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UNCLAS MUSCAT 000524

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STATE FOR NEA/ARPI, EB/TPP/ATT, AND EB/TPP/MTA/IPC
STATE PASS USTR FOR JBUNTIN
COMMERCE FOR ITA COBERG
AGRICULTURE FOR FAS JBERNSTEIN
DUBAI FOR ATO HENNEY

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS:

SUBJECT: TRADE MINISTER REAFFIRMS STRONG COMMITMENT TO FTA

REF: MUSCAT 502

SUMMARY

1. (U) Commerce and Industry Minister Maqbul Sultan reiterated Oman's strong commitment to seeing the FTA through the Congressional review process, expressing Oman's readiness to ratify the agreement once U.S. deliberations are complete. End Summary.

ADDRESSING FTA CONCERNS

2. (U) On April 3, the Ambassador paid an introductory call to Commerce and Industry Minister Maqbul bin Ali Sultan. Maqbul, responding to the Ambassador's positive readout of the FTA deliberations in Washington, expressed optimism that the April 5 House Ways and Means Committee hearing would go well. He stressed that Oman was ready to meet Congressional labor concerns, stating that the government expects to implement, by October 31, its commitments outlined in his March 26 letter to Committee Chairman Thomas.

3. (SBU) On beef, Maqbul affirmed earlier statements (reftel) that Oman would approve U.S. imports, provided the shipments carried the usual certification. He was pleased to hear that U.S. and Omani agriculture officials will meet on April 4 to discuss Omani import regulations and U.S. safety standards. He said Oman was committed to ensuring that its regulations met international standards, consistent with GCC guidelines. Maqbul asked how the U.S. would respond to Omani beef shipments if it had reported a case of BSE. The Ambassador responded that the upcoming visit of the regional agricultural trade office would assist Omani officials in understanding U.S. import regulations. The Ambassador also mentioned the possibility of technical assistance on food inspection practices and regulations, consistent with international standards.

4. (SBU) On intellectual property protection, Maqbul commented that the Ministry was drafting a copyright law with World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) assistance, using Egypt's law as a model, and that Oman would accede to several outstanding WIPO agreements. (Note: The Ministry of Commerce and Industry reports that Oman is already a party to the WIPO Patent Cooperation Treaty (1971), International Convention for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (1991), Copyright Treaty (1996), and the Performances and Phonograms Treaty (1996). End Note.)

READY TO RATIFY

5. (SBU) Maqbul noted that Oman was ready to proceed with the agreement's ratification once the U.S. had completed its internal deliberation process. He mentioned that he had already secured approval by the Sultan and the Council of Ministers, and could move as quickly as late May in completing internal processing requirements, if needed.

BUSY CALENDAR

6. (SBU) Maqbul noted that the U.S.-Oman FTA is just one of several "free trade agreements" that Oman, under the GCC umbrella, is currently negotiating with the EU, India, Pakistan, Turkey, China, Singapore and Japan. Maqbul predicted these negotiations would be more time-consuming, as opposed to its negotiations with the U.S., where it had to work on the basis of a predetermined model. The Ambassador reminded the Minister that the agreement, a product of careful deliberations between the Administration and

Congress, not only represents good policy, but also will afford Oman extraordinary economic and developmental opportunities.

GRAPPO